

News of Soviet Space Losses Muzzled by '61 US Decision

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Palo Alto, Calif. - News on failures of Soviet manned space flights is, at least in part, "managed" by Washington. No American without access to the relevant classified information can know for sure whether the Soviets have suffered fatalities in space. But the evidence is clear that Washington would not tell even if it knew all about Soviet space accidents.



Komarov

Rumors that Soviet cosmonauts were lost have been circulating for years — long before Vladimir M. Komarov was killed last April, in the only fatal accident admitted by Moscow.

For example, on Oct. 4, 1965, Electronic News reported that "the Russians have lost 10 cosmonauts, including one woman, in faulty space shots." This information was attributed to "a top NASA official."

"Penkovskiy Papers"

In the same year, the celebrated "Penkovskiy Papers" were published. Col. Oleg Penkovskiy was a high official in Soviet intelligence, considered by President Kennedy to be our best informer inside the USSR. During the Cuban missile crisis of 1962, Kennedy relied on Penkovskiy's information about Soviet missile preparedness. Penkovskiy was caught and executed.

The Penkovskiy book contains two references to Soviet space fatalities. "Several Sputniks were launched . . . and never heard from again," the colonel reported. "They took

the lives of several trained astronauts." He also asserted: "There were several unsuccessful launchings of sputniks, with men killed prior to Gagarin's flight. Either the missile would explode on the launching pad or it would go up and never return."

The central intelligence agency (CIA) allowed the publication of the Penkovskiy materials.

In hearings before the foreign operations and government information subcommittee on May 23 and June 6, 1963, witnesses from the national aeronautics and space administration (NASA) hinted broadly that the Soviets had suffered various mishaps in space. But, on the ground that the information was classified, they shied away from full disclosure.

A few years ago, a high official of a Czech-Soviet space research center in Prague leaked to an Italian news agency the story that several Soviet cosmonauts had died in space.

Even more authentic was the front page story in the British Communist paper London Daily Worker on Apr. 12, 1961. The headlines read: "Soviet cosmonaut circles earth three times. . . . First man in space

back alive — but suffering from effects of his flight."

The story was wired to the Daily Worker by its Moscow correspondent, Dennis Ogden.

He and other Communist correspondents had received sealed envelopes which contained the sensational story. The envelopes were not supposed to be opened without the permission of the Soviet government. All the Communist newsmen, except Ogden followed the order.

Since the launching, actually, was a failure, the Kremlin never released the story — and only Ogden sent a dispatch anyway.

Fatalities Reported at 12

According to reliable information, the CIA submitted a confidential document to the White House early this year reporting the deaths of at least 11 Soviet cosmonauts in addition to Komarov.

The Washington decision not to disclose information on Soviet manned space flight failures was made Jan. 13, 1961, during the last days of the Eisenhower administration, presumably to protect intelligence sources.

At present, Washington's silence appears to be motivated by the strong desire to hear no evil, see no evil and speak no evil about the USSR.

According to the 1961 agreement, NASA publishes information on Soviet space activities which has been "authorized for public release through the office of the assistant secretary of defense for public affairs," provided "the data on foreign space activities" have been "officially reported to the United Nations registry." In addition, information can be released only if it is confirmed by the United States space surveillance system run by the North American air defense command.

However, only those confirmed "data on foreign space activities (including failures)" can be released by NASA "which have been publicly announced by the foreign government concerned."

With the one exception of the Komarov catastrophe, which could not be concealed,

the Soviets have never announced any of their manned space flight failures. Hence, the agreement of Jan. 13, 1961, has probably resulted in the withholding of such information from the American public.

On July 4, 1967, the Moss act became law. It stipulates that, unless disclosure would endanger national security, government information should be made available to the American people.

It is hard to see how information about Soviet space failures could hurt the United States. Nor is there any emergency which, to deceive a political opponent, would justify news management. The United States government has been re-

porting on Soviet nuclear tests without ever asking Moscow's permission. Since the first Soviet nuclear explosion in 1949, American security, which ultimately is dependent upon an informed public, has been predicated on the release policy originated by President Truman.

The department of defense-NASA agreement results in deceiving the American public and is, therefore, incompatible with the spirit and letter of the Moss act. It is high time that Washington gave an honest accounting of Soviet space losses.

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